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Leaders Fight for LI's Status

Say OMB designation will cost

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Long Island political and business leaders Friday pressed federal officials to reverse, temporarily at least, a decision that strips the Island of its statistical status as a metropolitan area separate from New York City.



During a congressional hearing at the federal courthouse in Central Islip, local business and political leaders stepped up their campaign to overturn a June 6 change by the federal Office of Management and Budget reversing a decision made 30 years ago to treat the Island as a discreet Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. Critics say the move will result in a reduction in federal aid to the Nassau-Suffolk area.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) told the panel she requested OMB officials earlier this week to temporarily suspend their June 6 decision to take into account local concerns. "We are not going to lose this battle," Clinton vowed during a break in the 2 1/2-hour hearing, which was attended by about 100 people.

However, Michael R. Ratcliffe, chief of the U.S. Census Bureau's population distribution branch, said it remained to be seen whether OMB would agree to reverse the changes. OMB officials did not return calls for comment.

Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington), who chaired the panel, expressed optimism that the changes may be temporarily reversed as early as next week. Reps. Tim Bishop (D-Southampton) and Carolyn McCarthy (D-Mineola) also sat on the panel hearing testimony.

The OMB, in releasing new guidelines for how different parts of the country are defined geographically, said that Long Island is now one of four divisions in what is called the New York-Newark-Edison-NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Statistical Area. Under previous guidelines, Long Island, with a population of 2.75 million - larger than 17 states - was considered by OMB as a primary metropolitan statistical area.

The change is critical because as a division of a larger entity, the Island must now compete with other parts of the entity for federal dollars.

Ratcliffe testified that the Census Bureau and OMB revise statistical guidelines every decade. "It's for purely statistical purposes," Ratcliffe said. "They're not intended to be used for funding purposes."

But Jeffrey Reynolds, communications coordinator for the Long Island Association for AIDS Care, told the panel that Long Island will lose about \$7 million a year for people with HIV.

Jim Morgo, executive director of the Long Island Housing Partnership, said the Island is already losing thousands of young people who cannot afford homes here, and will lose more if federal Housing and Urban Development subsidies are reduced.

Jack O'Connell, executive director of the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, said the region would also lose various categories of statistical data regarding personal income and family income levels it needs to apply for federal funding. Data now will be compiled for the whole region.

And Mitch Pally, a vice president of the Long Island Association, said the bi-county area would lose its identity. "We don't market Glen Cove," Pally said. "We don't market Babylon. We market Long Island."

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